

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 MADRID 5291

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, SP

SUBJECT: SIGNIFICANCE OF BASQUE ELECTION RETURNS

SUMMARY: THE IMPORTANCE OF THE BASQUE PROBLEM TO EFFORTS TO RESOLVE THE CRITICAL ISSUE OF REGIONAL AUTONOMY PROMPTED THE ANALYSIS, BELOW, BY AMCONSUL BILBAO OF THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ELECTION RESULTS THERE. THE LARGE VOTER TURNOUT -- IN STRIKING CONTRAST TO THE LOW REFERENDUM TURNOUT -- PROVIDES A BASQUE ENDORSEMENT OF THE DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM. MOREOVER THE DOMINANCE IN THE ELECTION RETURNS OF GONZALEZ' PSOE AND THE MODERATE BASQUE PNV (WHO ARE COLLABORATING ON A BASQUE APPROACH TO THE AUTONOMY ISSUE) SUGGESTS THE VOTERS HAVE LITTLE USE FOR EXTREMIST POSITIONS INCLUDING THAT OF THE TERRORIST ETA. END SUMMARY.

1. ALTHOUGH ONLY 42 PARLIAMENTARY SEATS -- 26 CONGRESS, 16 SENATE -- WERE CONTESTED IN SPAIN'S FOUR BASQUE PROVINCES (VIZCAYA, GUIPUZCOA, ALAVA, AND NAVARRE), THE REGION'S IMPORTANCE TO SPAIN'S POLITICAL EVOLUTION SO FAR EXCEEDS ITS MODEST SHARE OF THE TOTAL PARLIAMENTARY REPRESENTATION (350 DEPUTIES; 207 ELECTED SENATORS) THAT THE BASQUE RETURNS MERIT SEPARATE TREATMENT. BRIEFLY, THE RESULTS (IN SEATS) FOR THE CONGRESS AND SENATE RACES, RESPECTIVELY, WERE:

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	PSOE	PNV	UCD	OTHER
VICAYA	3	4	2	1 (AP)
GUIPUZCOA	3	3	0	1 (IE)
ALAVA	1	1	2	0
NAVARRE	2	0	3	0
TOTAL (26)	9	8	7	2
PSOE/PNV				

	COALITION	UCD	OTHER
VIZCAYA	3	1	0
GUIPUZCOA	3	0	1 (IE)
ALAVA	3	1	0
NAVARRRE	1	3	0
TOTAL (16)	10	5	1

2. THE LEVEL OF PARTICIPATION IN THE ELECTION CONSTITUTES A RESOUNDING VOTE OF CONFIDENCE IN THE SUAREZ LED POLITICAL REFORM PROCESS. IN STRIKING CONTRAST TO THE WEAK TURNOUT FOR THE DECEMBER 1976 REFERENDUM, IN WHICH ONLY 45 PERCENT OF THE ELECTORATE VOTED IN GUIPUZCOA AND 52 PERCENT IN VIZCAYA, THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION BROUGHT OUT NEARLY 70 PERCENT IN THE FORMER AND ALMOST 75 PERCENT IN THE LATTER PROVINCE, CLOSE TO NATIONAL AVERAGES. DESPITE THE ATTEMPTED INTIMIDATION OF A 10-DAY PRE-ELECTORAL WAVE OF BOMBINGS (MOSTLY CLAIMED BY ETA'S "MILITARY" WING, BUT IN WHICH EXTREME RIGHTIST ALSO PARTICIPATED), THE MAJOR BASQUE POLITICAL GROUPINGS AND THE AVERAGE BASQUE VOTER SIMPLY HAD NO INTENTION OF SITTING THIS ONE OUT. SUAREZ' ADROIT LAST-MINUTE DEFUSING OF THE AMNESTY ISSUE, THROUGH PRISONER RELEASES, UNDERCUT THOSE WHO ADVOCATED A PRO-AMNESTY "ACTIVE ABSTENTIONISM."

3. IN THE LOWER HOUSE ELECTION, THE PSOE HAD A SLIGHT EDGE, WITH 25.2 PERCENT OF THE TOTAL VOTE TO 24.2 PERCENT

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FOR THE SECOND PLACE BASQUE NATIONALIST PARTY (PNV), AND THIS TRANSLATED INTO A ONE SEAT MARGIN FOR THE PSOE OVER THE PNV. IN THE SENATE CONTEST, THE PSOE/PNV-BACKED "FRENTE AUTONOMICO" (FA), WITH 10 SENATORS, TOOK AN ABSOLUTE MAJORITY OF THE 16 CONTESTED SEATS.

-- IN ITS STRONGHOLDS OF VIZCAYA AND GUIPUZCOA, THE PNV PREDICTABLY ACHIEVED A PLURALITY, BUT THE PSOE'S DOMINANCE OF THE EMIGRANT VOTE ALLOWED IT TO RUN A SURPRISINGLY CLOSE SECOND. ALTHOUGH UCD WAS SHUT OUT IN GUIPUZCOA, THE ONLY PROVINCE IN SPAIN WHERE IT RAN NO CANDIDATES (IN RECOGNITION OF THE ANTI-MADRID SENTIMENT THERE), IT CAPTURED TWO SEATS IN VIZCAYA, FOLLOWED BY ALIANZA POPULAR, WITH ITS SINGLE BASQUE REPRESENTATIVE. IN MARKED CONTRAST OT THE OTHER THREE BASQUE PROVINCES, SUFFICIENT NUMBERS OF THE YOUNG AND ALIENATED IN GUIPUZCOA VOTED FOR THE "BASQUE LEFT" (IZQUIERDA DE EUZKADI), IDENTIFIED WITH ETA ELEMENTS, TO GIVE IT ONE DEPUTY AND ONE SENATOR.

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-- NOT SUPRISINGLY, THE PROVINCES OF ALAVA AND NAVARRE PRODUCED MARKEDLY DIFFERENT RESULTS FROM THOSE OF VIZCAYA AND GUIPUZCOA. UCD RUNNING QUITE WELL, GARNERED PLURALITIES IN BOTH PROVINCES' LOWER HOUSE CONTESTS. AND WON THREE OF THE FOUR SENATORIAL SEATS FROM NAVARRE (PROMPTING ONE OF UCD'S NAVARRESE SENATORS TO REAFFIRM, SHORTLY AFTER THE RETURNS WERE IN, THAT "NAVARRE OBVIOUSLY IS NOT PART OF EUZKADI"). THE PSOE RAN SECOND TO UCD IN THESE TWO PROVINCES, AS IT HAD TO THE PNV IN VIZCAYA AND GUIPUZCOA, WHILE THE PNV'S PERFORMANCE WAS SPOTTY - SHUT OUT IN THE LOWER HOUSE IN NAVARRE, WHERE PARTY PRESIDENT CARLOS GARAICOECHEA WAS UNABLE EVEN TO COME CLOSE, AND ONLY ONE DEPUTY FROM ALAVA. -- THE BIGGEST LOSER OF ALL TURNED OUT TO BE THE COMMUNISTS (PCE), WITH AN AVERAGE OF ONLY 4 PERCENT OF THE VOTE. THEY WERE UNABLE TO MAKE A CONTEST OF IT IN ANY OF THE FOUR PROVINCES, AND EVEN RAN FAR BEHIND THE ULTRA-LEFT "IZQUERDA DE EUZKADI." -- THE EXTREME LEFT, BASQUE AND OTHERWISE, WAS FRAGMENTED, ALTHOUGH ITS SHARE OF THE VOTE (AN AVERAGE OF 16.1 PERCENT IN THE 4 PROVINCES) MARKEDLY EXCEEDED THE SPANISH NORM. ITS TOTAL SHARE OF THE VOTE RANGED FROM 8.4 PERCENT IN ALAVA TO A SURPRISING 23.1 PERCENT IN NAVARRE.

4. SUPPORT FOR AUTONOMY, VAGUELY DEFINED, WAS IMPRESSIVE, ALTHOUGH THE RETURNS ATTENUATED THE PNV'S LONG-HELD CON-
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TENTION THAT "EUZKADI" IS A FOUR-PROVINCE SOCIO-CULTURAL UNIT WHICH SHOULD BE TREATED AS A POLITICAL ENTITY (AN APPROACH USED TO LEND FORCE TO AUTONOMIST ASPIRATIONS FELT MORE STRONGLY IN VIZCAYA AND GUIPUZCOA THAN IN ALAVA

AND NAVARRE). EVEN SO, THE PNV, AS THE MAJOR SPOKESMAN FOR THE MOST INTENSELY FELT BASQUE ASPIRATIONS, CONTINUES TO BE THE CRITICAL INGREDIENT IN THE BASQUE EQUATION. IT IS COLLABORATING CLOSELY WITH THE PSOE, WHICH BY VIRTUE OF ITS STRONG ELECTORAL SHOWING IS PLAYING A KEY ROLE IN THE AUTONOMY QUESTION GENERALLY, AND WE ASSUME THAT A PSOE-PNV COMMON POSITION ON BASQUE AUTONOMY WILL CONTAIN MUCH THAT ALSO IS ACCEPTABLE TO THE GOVT, SINCE THERE APPEAR TO BE NO UNBRIDGEABLE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE PSOE AND SUAREZ' UCD ON THE REGIONAL QUESTION. STABLER

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